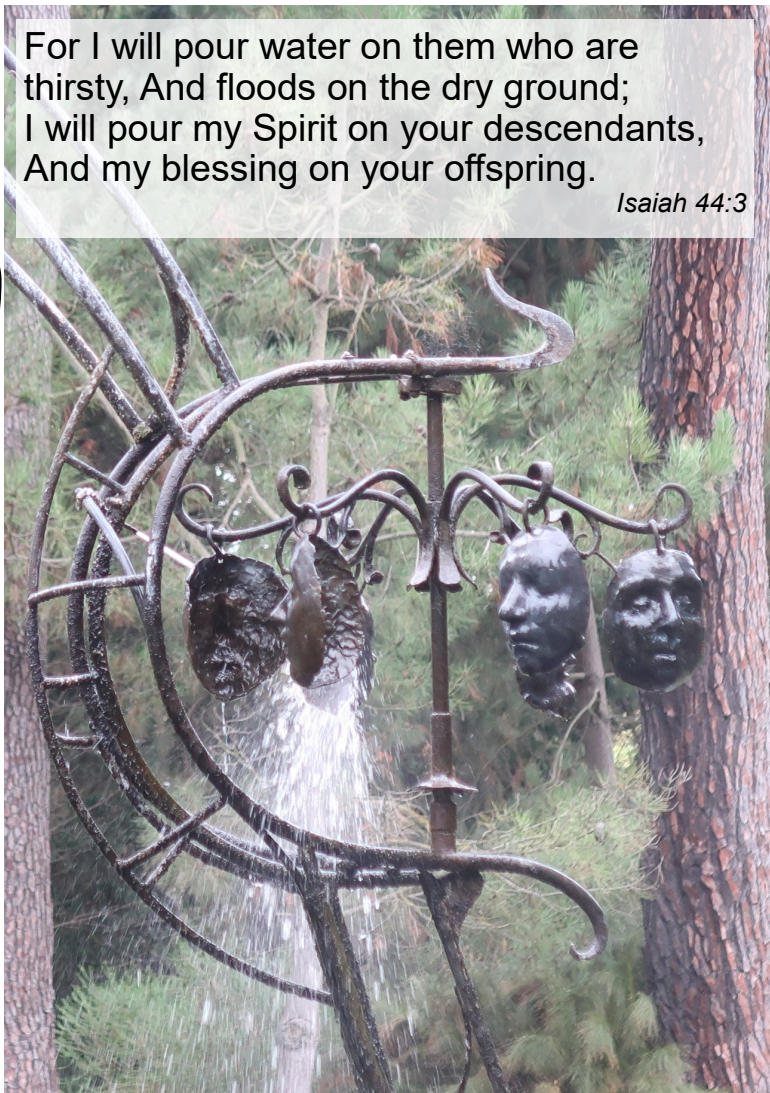


St Helen's Magazine

June 2020

For I will pour water on them who are
thirsty, And floods on the dry ground;
I will pour my Spirit on your descendants,
And my blessing on your offspring.

Isaiah 44:3



St Helen's Church

Ashby-de-la-Zouch



Loving God, loving others, loving the world

Parish Directory

(The dialling code for these numbers is 01530 except where stated)

ASHBY YOUTH FOR CHRIST	AYFC Office	560940
BELL RINGERS	Michael Davidson	DAVIDSON29029@aol.com
BUILDINGS' TEAM		sthelensbuildings@gmail.com
CHURCHWARDENS	Helen Smith	563352
	Val Bowron	467571
HERITAGE CENTRE LETTINGS	Elaine Shaw	07392 409745
		sthelenslettings@gmail.com
DIRECTOR OF MUSIC	Andrew Chapman	07792 461782
ELECTORAL ROLL	Eileen Coombs	417883
FLOWER ROTA	Margaret Lawrence	416370
FOODBANK CONTACT	Alan Sedgman	07576 838129
HERITAGE	Sharn Stinson	07435 564236
		sthelensheritage@gmail.com
LANTERNS children's group	Clare Crawford & Lynne Munro	564772 & 563389
MAGAZINE ADVERTISING	Sue Evans	461808
MAGAZINE EDITOR	Jill Chapman	01827 830748
		jill.chapman12@btopenworld.com
MAGAZINE DISTRIBUTION	Margaret Worrall	413665
MINISTERS - Rector	Mary Gregory	564372
		revmarygregory@aol.co.uk
- Curate	Stewart Betts	563762
		07919 890094
		stewart@flagstaff.org.uk
MOTHERS' UNION	Margaret Worrall	413665
PCC SECRETARY	John Dennis	416124
PCC TREASURER	John Backman	01283 761385
PLANNED GIVING OFFICER	Anne Heaton	467904
READERS	Sue Brown	417313
	Carol Eyley	412334
	Judith Lewis	564204
	Andy Smith	563352
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SAFEGUARDING	Elizabeth Smith	07941 935887
SERVERS	Eileen Barradel	416370
SOUND SYSTEM	Simon Starkey	415718
STREET PASTORS CONTACT	Chris Lewis	07828 463368

Contact details:

- Parish office: ♦ sthelensashby@gmail.com
 ♦ 07725 519453
 ♦ Community Heritage Building, 4 Church Yard, South St, LE65 1AA
- ♦ Facebook pages: St Helen's Ashby de la Zouch
 St Helen's Heritage Ashby de la Zouch
- ♦ Twitter: @sthelensashby
- ♦ Website: sthelensashby.net
- ♦ Flagstaff Team: www.flagstaff.org.uk

Editor Writes ...

As I write this on the last day of May, we have been in 'lockdown' for 55 days. It feels like a very long time. During June some measures will begin to be lifted - for some it can't come soon enough, for others it's too soon. And both points of view are understandable. On page 4 Revd Mary is thinking about what lockdown means.



I saw various suggestions on social media platforms throughout April that it would all be over by 3rd May, which would have been 40 days. There's a lot of cultural meaning packed into the number 40 – a human pregnancy last for 40 weeks for example, a perfect nap is 40 winks, Ali Baba clashes with 40 thieves in the Arabian Nights and life begins at 40! When the bubonic plague gripped Europe during the Middle Ages, ships would be isolated in harbour for 40 days before passengers could go ashore. The Italian word for 40 is quaranta, hence quarantine.

There are plenty of Biblical events which draw upon the number also: after leading the Exodus of the Israelites out of Egypt Moses spent 40 years in the desert; he was on Mount Sinai for 40 days when receiving the commandments; the great flood was caused by 40 days and nights of rain; Goliath taunted Saul's army for 40 days before David arrived to slay him; Jesus fasted in the desert for 40 days; and there were 40 days between Jesus' resurrection and ascension. Some people believe that 40 is shorthand for a long time. On page 6 Eileen Coombs is reflecting on spending a long time without being in our church building, and on page 13 Anne Heaton thinks about some aspects of the building we miss most.

The picture on the front cover is a fountain we saw in Christchurch, New Zealand, when we holidayed there in March 2019. I sought the photo out to illustrate the piece Richard Vann has written for us (page 20). But seeing it reminded me of all the mixed emotions on the day I took it. We'd arrived in Christchurch a few days after a gunman had killed 51 men, women and children, and injured 49 others in attacks on two mosques. On walking into the park in which we saw this beautiful artwork, we'd walked past the cordoned off street where one mosque was situated. Near to the fountain was a vast area of floral tributes. In March this year, in one of the many news stories disappeared by the Coronavirus, the perpetrator suddenly and unexpectedly changed his plea from not guilty to admit all charges. The families have said this is an answer to their prayers. To them, no doubt, the last 12 months has seemed like a very long time. One of the prayers which has helped us through this long lockdown can be found on page 24.

Jill Chapman





Revd Mary Writes ...

My dear Friends

Yesterday evening saw the tenth and final 'Clap for Carers', for key workers, including supermarket workers, teachers, funeral directors and refuse collectors, as well as doctors, nurses and care assistants. On our streets, these Thursday night gatherings of hand-clapping, saucepan-banging and voice-whooping (something that has pushed our British reserve to the very limit) have not only been a way of honouring those who serve us, but also of connecting with our neighbours, some of whom we may not have known before lock-down.

'Clap for Carers' has become, then, a great example of a curious lock-down phenomenon; of how at a time when our horizons have shrunk we have actually *seen* more; seen things which at other, busier, times we may have taken for granted. And so we have, perhaps for the first time, noticed how much we rely on some of our country's lowest-paid workers and have thanked them with messages painted on our dustbins, or by giving our posties a thumbs up. We have come to recognise our neighbours' faces, perhaps even learned their names. We have seen how much we depend on one another. We have seen our connectedness.

We might all long to get 'back to normal' - whatever 'normal' might look like in the future - but I, for one, don't want to lose some of what has been normal in *lock-down*, not least this new awareness of one another, this special attentiveness to those we have previously overlooked. I want us to keep noticing one another, keep thanking one another, keep recognising those who serve us with tasks which are not remotely glamorous but *are* completely essential.

Paying attention to what might otherwise be over-looked is a Godly pursuit, for we are told that he counts all the hairs on our heads and notices when even a sparrow falls to the ground. When your eyes can range over wider horizons, again, when you're busyness threatens to distract you again, pray that you would continue to notice, and to value, your neighbours, your supermarket check-out assistant, your recycling collectors, your postmen and women. Like you, they are precious to God, and you rely on them. Even when the clapping stops, let the gratitude, the noticing, continue.

With love
Mary

Heritage

I hope everyone is remembering to check in to find out what's happening on the Heritage Facebook page - www.facebook.com/sthelensheritage/ and on the Heritage page of the St Helen's website. There are all sorts of creative craft ideas and, of course, updates from the 'church mice'!



Prayer for the Christian Community

by Barbara Glasson, President of the Methodist Conference

We are not people of fear:
We are people of courage.
We are not people who protect our own safety:
We are people who protect our neighbours' safety.
We are not people of greed:
We are people of generosity.
We are your people God,
Giving and loving,
Wherever we are,
Whatever it costs,
For as long as it takes
Wherever you call us.
Amen

Some reflections on Lockdown

Lockdown has been a “weird and wonderful” time for me personally. “Weird” because my freedom of movement has been very much restricted, my choice of how I can use my time severely limited and of course, I cannot even meet up with family and friends. For someone who likes being out and about, socialising with friends, visiting the housebound, running errands and volunteering in various capacities, this is exceptionally challenging and frustrating. It feels surreal walking on literally empty roads, through empty public car parks, yet seeing supermarket queues endlessly lengthening. It is bizarre when I have to step off the pavement when I DO see another person coming towards me. It feels eerily quiet everywhere, and I truly feel socially and emotionally disconnected. Initially, I did have a few wobbles, and a few tearful days.

YET, lockdown has shown me another way to live my life, to trust God unreservedly and not to rely on my own strength to overcome this predicament, to challenge myself in all sorts of ways to accept positively what cannot be changed and to remind myself to count my blessings, which are many, day to day for the past eight weeks.

“The believers devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread.” - a verse From Acts I read for one of the services. Morning and evening prayers on Facebook have, without a doubt, been a godsend during these weeks of self-isolation. Thanks to Mary and her wonderful team, we have been spiritually fed, encouraged and uplifted daily. They give me a focus for prayer and reflection throughout each day, a time to be connected to the wider church family, giving me a sense of togetherness and community. “Be still and know that I am God” has become my mantra and song, comforting as well as calming. I definitely have much more time to read the Bible, pray and contemplate, making me more aware of God’s presence and hand in my life. I’m also grateful to Mary and Stewart for enabling us to “break bread” as the body of Christ during the week, which I must admit, has been and is a central part of my faith.

“This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it.” - so Alison Gregory suggested at Morning Prayer. We are indeed very glad that since the beginning of lockdown, the weather has been glorious. We can enjoy the beauty of each new day, the clear blue sky, the warmth of the sun; hear the chirping of birds; and breathe in fresh unpolluted air. Surely this is what God intends creation to be and we His people “to rejoice and be glad in it”.

“The wilderness will rejoice and blossom like the crocus, it will burst into bloom,” - a quote from one of Mary’s talks. Taking my permitted daily walk has been a true blessing during this difficult time. My eyes are attracted to the blossoming of so many flowers in the forests and woodlands. Daffodils

swaying in the gentle breeze, our much loved red poppies springing up in the churchyard, bluebells in their resplendent colour carpet the entire woodland, not to mention forget-me-nots, primroses and cowslips vying with each other for my attention. Then, there is the bright yellow gorse on the hillside reflecting the brilliance of the sun; the swans, coots, mallards, moorhens each with their family of chicks frolicking in the water. It is indeed a feast for the eyes, a beauty to behold and a wonderfully blissful experience.

“Do not despise the day of small things.” - I find that verse extremely useful and relevant while I wait for lockdown to be eased. I attempt to make the wait worthwhile because of what I can do every single day. I have a daily allotted time to phone friends, write letters or cards, text or email to catch up, listen and mutually encourage. Through the marvellous technology at our disposal, I manage to stay in touch with old friends, ex-colleagues, past students, even high school classmates who have emigrated abroad. As time is no longer an issue, I can spend much more time in this re-connection process and truly treasure these rekindled friendships. Another positive that comes about during lockdown is the increased neighbourliness in my street. The Thursday night “Clap for NHS” and the VE Day 75th anniversary celebrations brought all the residents closer together, so much so that we are now having more drinks gathering on our drives at the weekend. My immediate neighbour, without me asking, even jet-washed my drive and will paint my garage floor next week. How amazing is that?

I’m sure people have heard of binge drinking. Since I don’t drink, I have embarked on binge television watching instead, something I have never done in my entire life. I suppose there is no harm in that because after all, it is relaxing, entertaining and at times highly amusing. Besides, while watching episode after episode on television, I did manage to knit nearly twenty very colourful woolly hats for the homeless. At least some good has come out of that new venture.

Miraculously, so far, the lockdown has been “weird and wonderful” for me. Once in a while, I do wonder what the “new normal” will be like. Yet, I totally agree with Mary’s calling us to “live NOW, to discern what our vocation is for such a time as this, and to fulfil that purpose faithfully.” The reminder for myself is “Be joyful always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances” and “Be alert, stay safe and save lives”.



The Buildings are Closed, the Church is Open

I am, like thousands of other Christians, not able to meet in my own church of St. Peter's Mancetter, Atherstone. I have been joining in on Sunday mornings with your worship and really enjoying it. I also, occasionally, join in the Compline services and the Prayer for the Day, which again I enjoy and find fulfilling.

I found out about you from a friend in Mancetter. Her sister lives on a narrow boat and was moored at Ashby and told my friend about your on-line services. I went on to your website and found the videos. As I had just joined Facebook, I was able to join the live services.

I have read your May Magazine, online, and can I say how much I appreciated reading it. Please pass on to Andrew Chapman and the whole team my thanks and appreciation for all the hard work they put in to produce the music for the hymns on Sundays.

Just in case you are wondering, I am female. People who don't know me often mistake my name for a male. I think that is because, as I have discovered, down in the South West mainly, Russett is a surname. I was named after my mum, and she was named after her mother's favourite apple.

Russett Greig



Mystery Worshipper

As the Ship of Fools website says, 'The Mystery Worshipper comes like a thief in the Nunc Dimittis.'

Did you know that in the same way that there are mystery shoppers, there are mystery worshippers? One of the more entertaining places where you can read their reviews is on the Ship of Fools website - <https://shipoffools.com/mystery>

Ship of Fools was first launched in 1977 as a print magazine, but sank in 1983 after ten issues. It was raised again on April Fool's Day 1998 as a website, and quickly grew into an online community as well as a webzine, described as the 'online magazine of Christian unrest.'

"We're here for people who prefer their religion disorganized," says the Ship's editor and designer, Simon Jenkins.

The Mystery Worshipper, launched in 1998, is one of their regular features, and has continued despite the closing of churches due to Covid19. Mystery Worshippers are volunteers who visit churches of all denominations worldwide. The church needs to be somewhere where they are not known. The review that they write is a first-timer's impression of how it was to be in church that day.



Ordinarily they would leave a calling card in the collection plate and post a review of the service on the Ship of Fools' website. The calling card bit is trickier now services are attended on-line, as is mingling with people during the after-service cup of coffee. Other aspects of the role are easier – such as arriving at the service incognito, listening thoughtfully to the sermon, and joining in wholeheartedly with the singing and worship.

The review they write aims to describe what it was like to actually be there on that particular Sunday, and includes answers to some set questions that 'go to the heart of church life' such as...

How hard was the pew?

How warm was the welcome?

How long was the sermon?

Was the worship stiff-upper-lip, happy clappy, or what?

How much was it like heaven?

How much was it like... er... the other place?

What happened when you hung around after the service looking lost?

How would you describe the after-service coffee?

What one thing will you remember about all this in seven days' time?

Prominent on the Ship of Fools website it says, 'Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.'

Jill Chapman

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Star Trek Emblem
Jesperhansen1972

Zoe, my wife, and I were reflecting recently about how some groups often create their own vocabularies. For example, anybody who knows what a “tricorder” is, would probably also identify “impulse power and warp speed”.

These are terms created within the world of Star Trek. Although science fiction is a good example it is not a solitary one. When I worked for the Co-op there were specific terms that we would use; one colleague told of their despair when they asked one of their team to “throw out the case of wine”, meaning stack the bottles onto the shelf, however a case of wine being found in the bin(!!) was not appreciated. I too made this error, reminding a team member to rotate the yoghurts before putting them onto the shelves only to find them being spun in circles! This was not the intention of the instruction ...

The Church of England and the Church in general has a certain terminology that some people may struggle to comprehend. Although I find it difficult to believe that the time has come already, soon I will be ordained as a Priest. Incidentally, as I write this, I can confirm the date which will be the 29th of June at Leicester Cathedral at 3pm.

Inevitably this leads people to ask about what I have been for the last 10 months, after all last year I was ordained as deacon and became a Rev. A deacon is identified by the diagonal fashion a stole is worn - the stole is put over the left shoulder and tied down by the right side, Mr Universe style. However the role of a deacon is founded in serving and this is a perpetual part of ordination. Therefore the first year of being a deacon builds the very foundation of ministry that other Holy Orders could then build upon. Deacons are not able to preside at communion, bless, absolve or officiate at weddings.

Personally I have enjoyed my deacon year - it has not always been easy but has been an opportunity to understand ordination and God’s call upon my life. When I kneel before the Bishop in June that will be the beginning of a new phase in my ministry but it will also serve as a continuation of ministry as an ordained servant of God, which I think is a tremendous privilege and responsibility.

Revd Stewart

A Lockdown Prayer

by Nadia Bolz-Weber

I do not know when we can gather together again in worship, Lord. So, for now I just ask that:

When I sing along in my kitchen to each song on Stevie Wonder's Songs in The Key of Life Album, *that it be counted as praise.*

And that when I read the news and my heart tightens in my chest, *may it be counted as a Kyrie.*

And that when my eyes brighten in a smile behind my mask as I thank the cashier *may it be counted as passing the peace.*

And that when I water my plants and wash my dishes and take a shower *may it be counted as remembering my baptism.*

And that when the tears come and my shoulders shake and my breathing falters, *may it be counted as prayer.*

And that when I stumble upon a Tabitha Brown video and hear her grace and love of you *may it be counted as a hearing a homily.*

And that as I sit at that table in my apartment, and eat one more homemade meal, slowly, joyfully, with nothing else demanding my time or attention, *may it be counted as communion.* Amen.

ROTAS

HOW TO RECREATE THEM AT HOME DURING LOCKDOWN



COFFEE



STACKING THE CHAIRS



DOING THE FLOWERS



SUNDAY SCHOOL



LITURGICAL DUTIES



COUNTING THE COLLECTION

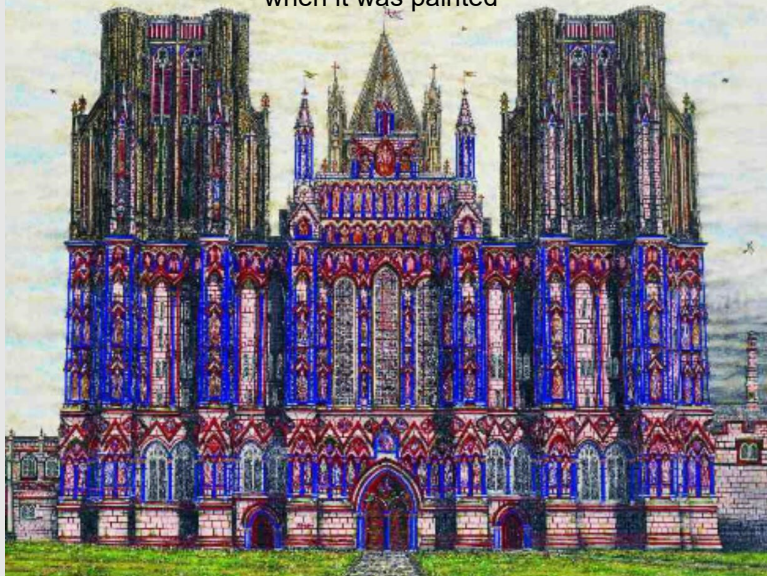
Why do we miss being in church so much?

This is a personal view. I've been thinking about this a lot, recently, while we cannot go into the church, even on our own for private prayer. Jesus said (Matthew 18:20) "For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them." More than two or three of us are gathered together on Facebook every day - so why do I miss the church building so much?

To answer this, I need to take you back to the high medieval, pre-Reformation church. Our St Helen's was built at this time, in the early 1470s, replacing at least one previous church. It would have been a very different building at that time. Imagine walking into a church full of colour and light, smells and sounds. The walls and columns would almost certainly have been covered in paint, perhaps wall paintings of bible stories or tales of the saints. Graffiti was encouraged, as a personal form of prayer! Stained glass windows would similarly have told stories to help the illiterate to understand the bible – remember there was no bible in English until 1535, and most people did not speak Latin, the language of church services. Some major churches and cathedrals were painted on the outside, too.

Inside the church there would have been a chancel screen, painted with images of the saints and prophets. The cult of saints was at its height, and local saints – probably some you have never heard of - were important. Above the screen would have been a rood beam and the

Artist's impression of the West Front of Wells Cathedral, when it was painted



Great Rood, a huge cross on which Christ hung, with the Virgin Mary on one side and St John on the other. People found this a shocking image at the time. They were scared of Purgatory, of hanging round in a painful 'entrance hall' to heaven, and believed that the prayers of the living could shorten this time. If you could afford it, you could guarantee prayers by buying something

for the church: a statue, silver chalice or other church plate, cloths for the altars (there would have been several), vestments for the priests, candles. Burials, if you could afford to be buried within the church, would have been covered with a slab, reminding everyone who passed over it that you needed their prayers. We have an example of this in Robert Nundi's slab. The church (without its north and south aisles) would have been packed with 'stuff'.

So coming into church would have given us a highly sensory experience. The service would begin with a procession of the clergy, wearing glorious, embroidered vestments, carrying candles and swinging censers. The procession would go to cense each altar before finishing in the chancel, behind the screen. This was out of bounds to most people; only the clergy went there, although we would have been able to see something beyond it. There would be candlelight glittering on the silverware on the stone altar at the east end. From then on, you and I would spend the time in personal prayer, perhaps before an image of a saint, on our knees. There would have been few seats: some at the front of the nave, perhaps, for the wealthiest, but the rest of us might have brought our own stools for the (short!) sermon. In the chancel, the priests would be speaking in latin, and if we could hear at

Early St Helen's interior, showing 17th century box pews, galleries, high pulpit and remains of chancel screen.



all it wouldn't make much sense. At one point a bell would ring, and we would look up and try to catch a glimpse through the screen of the priest raising the host. A choir would chant plainsong.

So far, it isn't difficult to imagine the scene. What IS difficult to envisage, perhaps, is that historians now believe that this was, for most people, a synaesthetic

experience. They could "feel" God by handling relics – some tombs were made with holes in so people could climb inside to be closer to a saint's relics. Holiness was emitted by images and statues. They could "smell" and "taste" God. The church was designed to enhance the use of the senses to give worshippers an overwhelming spiritual and emotional experience.

And then came the Reformation. By the end of the 17th century, St Helen's

had plain glass windows, box pews and galleries with seating facing the pulpit, which was high with a sounding board. There were no images and the walls were whitewashed. The focus was fully on The Word, with long sermons. The altar was no more; communion, perhaps 3 or 4 times a year, was at a wooden table close to the nave. Some churches even had pews in the chancel, facing the pulpit, but otherwise the chancel wasn't important. The Minister wore a plain white surplice over a black robe. There was no choir but the congregation sang hymns and psalms, though not as we sing them. The senses, other than hearing, were barely involved at all.

You might think that's where we are today, mostly. But it's not. In the 19th century, there were two major movements, the Oxford Movement and the Ecclesiologists, who longed for a return to the medieval church. Their ideas changed eighty percent of English Parish Churches, and St Helen's was one of these. The church was enlarged, the pews and galleries were removed, seating again faced the East End, a new

pulpit was smaller, Canon John Denton's scheme for stained glass windows was completed, a statue of the Virgin Mary was placed in the Lady Chapel, candles came back into use and elaborate chalices were brought out of storage. The communion table was replaced at the east end as an altar, vestments and textiles are used, and pictures and hangings adorn the walls. The choir wears robes.

St Helen's is essentially a neo-gothic church, in the image of the medieval church. Canon Denton clearly understood the medieval church - next time you are able to go into the building, look at the lower panes in the windows: on the north side (representing the devil in the medieval church) are the prophets, but on the south side, where the sun shines in, are the saints bathed in light and nearer to God. He knew his stuff, did Canon Denton!

So why are we missing being in church? We are still, fundamentally, drawn in by our senses, as were our pre-Reformation forebears. Being in church is an emotional, spiritual and sensory experience. And I, for one, can't wait to get back in!

Anne Heaton



Ashby's Choral Activities of the Past

It would be interesting to have a whole history of St Helen's Choir but I'm afraid I can't offer you that. Perhaps information exists in St Helen's Church archives but for this month's article I am offering some glimpses into the past from old newspapers.

Most churches had special funds saved up to offer the choir an annual treat and St Helen's was no exception. On 17th June 1874, St Helen's Church Choir went on an excursion to Alton Towers! In those days it was not a theme park of course. The party went by train, starting out very early so that on arrival they were able to spend the first hour exploring the castle, the "modern edifice in an unfinished state" and take a ramble along the "beautiful serpentine walks" before taking breakfast. The rest of the day was spent exploring the grounds and the hall before taking an excellent tea in the pavilion. The day ended with a ramble to the flag tower before returning home.

The next mention of the choir refers to the annual festival of the West and South Akeley Choral Union, which started in 1889 or 1890 and took place in St Helen's Church some years and Holy Trinity in others. The first available report on the proceedings appeared in the Derby Mercury on 4th July 1894.

The festival took place in St Helen's Church on a Wednesday that year and was obviously quite an event. There were nearly 300 voices in 13 different choirs from all over the Leicester archdeaconry of South ad West Akeley. There was a rehearsal in the church at 3pm, and at 5pm about 250 people sat down to a tea in the National School (now the library and museum in North Street). Canon Denton gave thanks to Mrs Pratt, Mrs German and about 20 other ladies from the parish who arranged it. The choirs and clergy assembled at the English School (the Hood Building) and walked in a very impressive procession to the west door of St Helen's Church singing "The God of Abraham Praise" as they went. The church itself was packed to capacity and as well as the choral singing there was a sermon preached by Dr Ingram, Dean of Peterborough, and the Parish Church Society of Change Ringers also played their part.

The last report I have been able to find about this annual festival is from 1909 when about 350 voices took part and it was held in Holy Trinity Church. The height of the festival, however, seems to have been 1907 when about 400 singers took part.

As before, the clergy and choirs carrying their banners, walked in procession from the English School to the church, preceded by a cross-bearer carrying a large processional crucifix from Holy Trinity Church. The music was that prepared and issued in the service book for district festivals of the Peterborough Diocese Choral Association for the year.

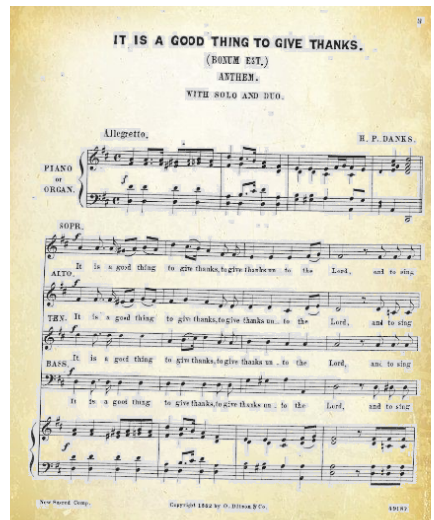
The anthem chosen was “It is a good thing to give thanks” which according to the Leicester Chronicle was “more difficult than had ever been attempted before. The verse part was allotted to the two Ashby choirs who more than maintained their musical reputations. The fugue at the end of the anthem is also difficult, but, except for a slight indecision in the concluding chorale, was well done.”

St Helen’s and Holy Trinity were not the only choirs in town as you might imagine. A Choral Society was started in 1877 and in May 1881 the it performed in “The New Assembly Rooms, Ashby”. The Leicester Journal reported that it was a “decided success” and that “the singing of the members of the Choral Society showed a marked improvement in style and effect [which] gave evidence of careful training and attention at the hands of Mr J Monk, the able conductor.”


in May 1895 the Society’s concert was held in the Market Hall. IThere were 130 performers and it was said that “the energy of the committee of the present society afforded on of the best musical treats Ashby has enjoyed for a long period.

However, even Choral Societies have their controversies it seems! In March 1926, a row broke out when it was said that the Vicar of Ashby, Rev. Andrews, had ordered women choristers to wear veils at a Choral Society performance in St Helen’s Church. Rev. Andrews denied having given such an order and said that he “simply lent the church for the performance of the Messiah”. He added that if the ladies had appeared in the church hatless, he would have gently reminded them that it was church custom for women to have their heads covered and, if necessary, he would have insisted on the custom being strictly followed. As a result, some members of the choir refused to appear. Rev. D. A. Thomas of Holy Trinity said that he had been approached to allow the concert in his church but had turned it down as he considered it better for the “Messiah” to be performed elsewhere than in a church. Others said that “it was tedious to sit speechless for a couple of hours, fine as the performance was, and not be able to applaud.” In the end, the matter was resolved when the ladies themselves decided to wear not veils but coloured handkerchiefs with the colour chosen to match their sashes.

Thank goodness we are able to enjoy a variety of musical performances in St Helen’s Church today without such controversies!



Wendy Freer



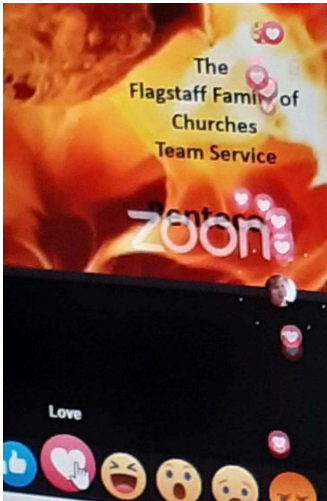
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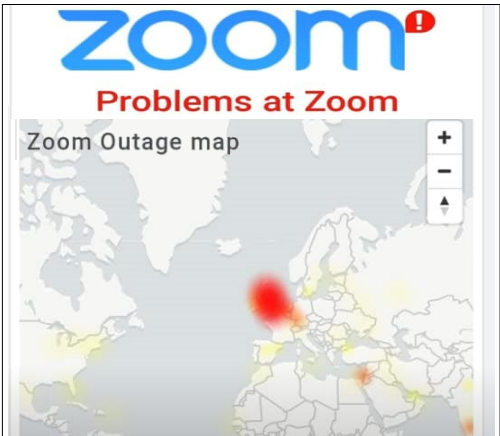
Also available on website - www.sthelenashby.net

On-line church in May

It has been a particular joy to have our morning Prayer for the Day led by some additions to the 'team' - Alison, Chris, Kathy and Pat.



We seem to have developed this on-line way of sharing the peace. Other highlights have included James Chapman playing the Last Post and Reveille for the VE day commemoration, and 'Beating the bounds' of the Flagstaff Churches in prayer. A 'lowlight' was when Zoom didn't work. But we had a fall-back plan and the service carried on.



From the Ascension to the Spirit of God

By 'spirit of God' I mean the Holy Spirit. The metaphors for the spirit of God, also known as the spirit of Jesus, include:

A candle flame that fills the room with just enough light to see, that flickers as if about to go out, that dances with delight, and that seems so small in a vast darkness.

A fountain, a beautiful cascade of spray and droplets, backlit by the sun.

The water that fills a jug or a glass or a cup. So still, so silent, and so unlike the previous metaphor. But when you sit down for a well-deserved rest after a long walk, the coolness and refreshingness (if that's a word) of a glass of water is like the renewing energy of the spirit of God.



The gentle breeze that cools you on a hot day, and you recall the times you were stuck on a sweaty train in the sweltering heat with no window to open. God bless the outdoors, and the gentle breeze on a nice Spring day.

The sound of a gong a long way off, calling you to the communal dinner at a Christian retreat house. The sound is often hardly discernible, but most welcome.

Any more metaphors? Yes, millions, for I've left out the breath of God, the taste of honey, the fragrance of lilac, the feel of silk, the whisper, and the sound of a stream, often called a babble.

Consider this - all of these are ordinary things.

But they are so precious.

And if we had to stop.

We would notice them more.

But let's move on.

The spirit of God is present with us now. And was that always the case?

Let me take you back to the moment you were born. Respectfully I ask, who gave you life, the life you still have now?

We know it was God who created the Heavens and the Earth, but leave that aside for a minute. Ponder the God who made you. Surely he would have been too busy with weighty, universal, matters? No. For you, he had all the time in the world.

Now look around you. Is there anyone who is like you?

No, none at all.

Most are the complete opposite! Meaning, you are unique. You are who you are. It's not as if you should try to become the person 'God meant you to be.'

To recap, when you were born, the spirit of God was with you. To my mind, this relationship is beyond words, and therefore cannot be explained. Instead, it is lived. It's like two explorers who agree they will cross a continent together. There are many dangers and many adventures. But the whole expedition happens with barely a word between them. They observe closely, and they rely on their understanding of each other.

What if you've recently become a Christian? You feel full of the Holy Spirit and bursting with new life. That's good. You're told you've been "adopted by God." In reality, the spirit of God never left you from the day you were born. You have always been a child of God, in my opinion. Yet I'm sure some will beg to differ, and will give you some other explanation.

Speaking of reality, it's hard to live in reality. It's hard to see a big danger that's so close it's almost breathing in your face. So I expect your life, like mine, is full of catastrophes and disasters that you did not see coming. We missed them because it's easier to live in our dreams, in our ambitions, and in the ideal world we're trying to create.

Well, the spirit of God is there too. The spirit of God is right there in our dreams, in our hopes, and in our prayers.

And does the spirit of God speak to you? If he or she speaks at all, it's usually in a whisper. Mostly, she or he is a silent companion, for the spirit of God insists that your life is Your Life. So you're unlikely to be given lists of suggestions to make your life better. No. Out of humility the Spirit stays silent, content to be with you, to just be with you. But that is everything.

Imagine this. The cloud drifts over the seascape looking like a charioteer, then a dinosaur, then a pot of tea, then a runner in the 100 metres.

Why would a cloud want to be so many different things? Because it's also dreaming. Yet the spirit of God is in the cloud, and you might say, is the cloud. The cloud that likes to be so many things.

So many words! But I've got nowhere, and haven't explained anything to you in a clear fashion. I had wanted to put the spirit of God into the jacket of a dictionary – I offered a whole page! But she (or he) turned me down.

No relationship is ever simple, or predictable, or easy work.

In conclusion, think on this. After 2000 years, we still have not properly engaged with the spirit of God. We would much rather do something as solid as oak, like surveying the wondrous cross, again.

Richard Vann

Bank Holiday Big Thank You

I am very grateful that plant sales* have helped to pay fair2all's rent during closure so I am splitting the takings from plant sales (after costs have been deducted) on Saturday 23rd and Monday 25th May between Watsan in Uganda and Child Rescue Nepal.



In Summer 2017 I was part of a team that worked on a project providing latrines and saw the work of Watsan providing water and sanitation in South West Uganda. I saw how Watsan works with rural communities to support them as they cap and then pipe water from springs to taps providing water for the community to use.

The support for Child Rescue Nepal will go via 12 year old Oliver who is fell running to raise money to install water tanks so people can wash their hands. Oliver is the 12 year old son of the owner of Namaste, one of fair2all's fair trade suppliers, based in Skipton. When he heard that Child Rescue Nepal has been asked to install water tanks in some of the major junctions in Makwanpur, he decided he wanted to raise money to support them. As the Yorkshire National Park is at the end of Oliver's road and he is a keen fell runner, he decided he and his dad will attempt to run the vertical height of Everest, (29029 feet) plus the distance from Kathmandu to Mount Everest (around 224 miles by road and path) by doing a daily run. For more information see their Just Giving Page <https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/namastefairtrade>

*Plants are on sale from our front path between approximately 10.30 – 7.00 daily (except Sunday) on corner of Shellbrook Close / Moira Road LE65 2TU. If you are able please use off road parking opposite.

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Mothers' UNION

Christian care for families

Mothers' Union - Putting Faith into Action

Across the UK and Ireland local MU branch members have stepped up their support for their churches and communities during the Covid -19 pandemic. In some dioceses, members are crafting thousands of essential items every week for the national effort, finding ways to protect key workers and to reassure the most vulnerable groups in society. Local requests from frontline NHS staff, as well as from those working in care homes, hospices, and mental health facilities, have been heeded and responded to. Mothers' Union scrubs and scrub bags help ensure staff can remove all clothing and keep it safely in a separate bag until it can be laundered, reducing risk of infection in the home, protecting families and households.

Mothers' Union in Dorset and Wiltshire responded when inmates at local prisons wanted to do something positive to help in the pandemic. Local MU branches were mobilised to source sewing machines so that prisoners could make scrubs for frontline workers and feel actively engaged in supporting vital work.

In Llandaff, members have produced pairs of knitted or sewn hearts for NHS coronavirus wards. One is given to the patient and the other to the family by hospital staff to try to ease the pain of families separated at the worst possible time, so that people can feel more connected with their relatives. Various other branches are working on similar projects for hospitals, hospices, and care homes, to help families get through these difficult times.

Mary Sumner House Financial Shortfall

In common with many other charities, Mothers' Union is facing a £1m shortfall in income in 2020 due to the pandemic. This puts the very future of Mothers' Union and its' projects worldwide at risk. Worldwide President Sheran Harper has launched a fund-raising appeal, and all members should have received a few weeks ago, details of how to support the appeal; alternatively, donations can be made via the website: www.mothersunion.org.

Beryl Stephens

Rainbow Prayer

From Compline/Night Prayer on May 12th:

Red is for danger.
We pray for those who are vulnerable this night,
for those at risk of harm from others or from themselves.
We pray for their rescue to a place of safety.

Orange is the colour of sunset, of day turning to night.
We pray for those weary at the end of a long day's labour,
for key workers coming off shift.
We pray that they would sleep this night in your peace,
and rise, refreshed, tomorrow.

Yellow is the crayon sun of a child's painting, always shining, full of hope.
We pray that as tomorrow dawns, you would surprise us with joy,
with renewed hope that is set, not on the predictions of pundits,
but on all that God has done for us in Christ Jesus.
Tomorrow, as hope rises within us, make us ambassadors of that hope.

Green is for growth.
We pray for this beautiful planet
that you have placed under our stewardship.
We thank you that in lockdown, creation is breathing again,
with clearer skies, brighter birdsong,
and a rainbowed carpet of wild flowers.
We thank you that as humanity has slowed down, nature has flourished.
Give us long memories so that when we are unlocked
we would not return all that you have made to the prison of our lifestyles.
May we share our freedom with the planet.

Blue is for sorrow.
We pray for all who are feeling blue;
for those who cannot contemplate many more weeks of lockdown;
for those who are missing family and friends;
for those who long for a hand to hold.
Even as we pray for them, reveal your presence to them.
Help them hear again the promise that you come and make your home
with those who love you.

Indigo is the sky of Van Gogh's starry night.
We pray for those who are dying,
that in the night-time of their lives

they would know the companionship
of the one whose own dying turned the
sky black;

that they would hear the invitation of the
one who flung stars into space
and that you would lead them home.

Purple is for courage.

We pray for ourselves that we would hold
on in these days -

hold on to hope, hold on to community,
hold on to you.

We thank you that you hold on to us and
will never let us go.

Amen.



Well Done, Good & Faithful Servant, Enter into the Joy of Your Master

Dennis Grainger, a much-loved member of our church, was commended into God's safe-keeping at his funeral at the end of May. Due to Covid-19, only Revd Mary and his close family were able to be present. Some of his many friends and church family were able to pay their respects standing along Upper Packington Road as the cortège was driven past. Here are some photos of them gathering.





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**This is the sermon preached by Revd Mary on 24th May 2020,
7th Sunday after Easter; John 17:1-11;**

Glorify

It's late night on June 28th last year. 100,000 people gathered in front of the Pyramid Stage at Glastonbury are chanting one name: 'Stormzy'. Stormzy is only twenty-five years old but he has 2.6 million followers on Instagram. He's the first black British artist to headline Glastonbury, the second youngest of any nationality or ethnicity ever to do so. His set is spectacular: he is styled by Banksy; duets with the biggest names in the music industry; preaches justice. The crowd roars its approval.

And then this happens: a Gospel choir streams onto the stage and Stormzy raises his arms aloft. 'We're going to give God all the glory' he cries and begins to sing 'Blinded by your grace': 'Lord, I've been broken, although I'm not worthy, you fixed me, I'm blinded by your grace, you came and saved me'. And then he kneels down and prays. The BBC calls this 'a minute of humility and grace in the midst of the biggest night of the star's life.' 'We're going to give God all the glory' he says.

It's late night about two thousand years ago. Thirteen people have shared a meal together - the last they will ever share. Twelve people have had their feet washed. One man has slunk off into the night to betray another man, Jesus Christ, who speaks to the remaining eleven of how they will live after he has died, how they are not to be afraid, how his Spirit will help them.

Now, this one man, Jesus, shifts his focus. He looks up to heaven and he prays, entrusting himself and his friends to his heavenly Father; to God. And what does he pray? - well, in this part of the prayer, he prays particularly for glory; that God would glorify him.

That sounds a bit strange, doesn't it, a bit 'off'; not very humble, not very 'Jesus'. After all, he's always resisted being swept along on the adulation of the crowd or the ambitions of others. Why then, now, does he ask to be glorified? - simply that through the glory he's given he may, in turn, glorify God. 'Father, glorify your Son', he prays, 'so that the Son may glorify you' (17.1). It's the same dynamic that Jesus had in mind earlier when he told his followers to let their light shine before others so that people might glorify God (Matthew 5.16).

We ask for glory, only so that God might be glorified through us. But how do we, glorify God? - by fulfilling what God asks of us. 'I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do' (v4), Jesus says; 'My friends have glorified me,' Jesus says, 'by keeping your word' (vv6, 10). God is glorified when what we do and say reflects his priorities; when our deeds and words are, in effect, 'His' and so point beyond us to him. Then the praise, the glory, that we're given becomes the praise of God

alone because everything we have done has been in his name, for his glory.

There's quite a challenge here, I think; a two-fold challenge.

Challenge part one: how ready are we to pray the glorifying prayer in its fullness? - not to pray only that we should be glorified - admired, respected, praised, liked - but that this should ultimately, only, be for God's glory - not ours? At the height of our success, standing on the pinnacle of others' praise do we, like Stormzy, kneel down, head low, and proclaim 'We're going to give God all the glory'? Do we? -- Honestly, I'm not sure I always do. Such a discipline goes against every human impulse for recognition, for our worth to be duly noted, so shall we pray that we would be so blinded by God's grace that we can see his glory alone? Shall we pray with the words of the music that was playing as we gathered this morning 'not to us, Lord, but to your name be the glory.'

Challenge part two: are we up for what we must do to be glorified, to glorify God; things which might look, to us, very much like shame? For how is Jesus glorified? - by embracing the most shameful death that his culture knew; by being crucified. In John's Gospel, Jesus has his 'Gethsemane moment' just as he arrives in Jerusalem days before his death. 'Now my soul is troubled', he says. 'And what should I say - "Father, save me from this hour"? No....Father, glorify your name' (12.27-28). It is on the cross that Jesus will be enthroned; on the cross that his Father will be glorified through him.

So for us, as Jesus' followers, as God's people, our moments of true glory, of glorifying God, might well look like defeat, not victory; like failure, not success; like disgrace, not honour. What God asks of us is sacrifice, laying-down, humility. In these is glory. Can you still pray, with Jesus, that God would glorify you, so that He might be glorified through you?

--

We're just beginning the Archbishop's annual Thy Kingdom Come prayer initiative. If you only pray one prayer could it be Jesus'? - that God would glorify you, even through shame, to the praise of his name alone. Amen.

Rev'd Mary Gregory

I had requests for two sermons to be printed in the magazine this month, this one and 'Looking For Jesus' which was preached on Ascension Day, (Thursday 21st May). A transcript is available on the St Helen's website, www.sthelensashby.net, in an article entitled 'Ascension Day' on the Recent Events tab.

I'm Blinded by Your Grace

The lyrics of the chorus of Stormzy's song are:

I'm blinded by your grace
I'm blinded by your grace, by your grace
I'm blinded by your grace
I'm blinded by your

Lord, I've been broken
Although I'm not worthy
You fixed me, now I'm blinded
By your grace, you came and saved me
Lord, I've been broken
Although I'm not worthy
You fixed me, now I'm blinded
By your grace, you came and saved me

If you'd like to see the film of Stormzy that Mary refers to in her sermon, there is a link to it on our website, www.sthelensashby.net, in an article entitled 'Glory ... and Stormzy' on the Recent Events tab.



Quotes for the Month

'A poll, commissioned by Christian Aid, found that The Vicar of Dibley ... would be the public's choice of screen priest to lead the UK through the coronavirus crisis.'

The Guardian, British public turn to prayer as one in four tune in to religious services, May 3rd

'[Judi] Dench is happiest when things are lovely. A Quaker since her teens, she may be divinely potty-mouthed, but she is also meditative and kind to the core.'

The Judi Dench Vogue interview, "Retirement? Wash Your Mouth Out", May 4th

'It seems to me during this time of captivity – as it were – our role as churches and as individual Christians is to cultivate a sense of abundance rather than scarcity; a sense of the wondrous things in life that are still true.'

Revd Sam Wells, Improvising Faith, Nomad podcast, May 6th

'The message we're all hearing is to stay home and stay safe. But what if you don't have anywhere safe to stay?'

Revd Richard Carter, St-Martin-in-the-Fields Emergency Appeal,

'There's never been an easier time to go to church.'

Krish Kandiah, Going to Church in Your Pyjamas, The Times, May 9th

'Every day, the governor asks Kentuckians to recommit themselves to fighting the coronavirus, much like how a preacher might ask their congregation to recommit themselves to their faith.'

Religionandpolitics.org, May 12th

'Grace is the cargo train that distributes into my life all the good and beautiful things that are unearnable: forgiveness, mercy, endless second chances, the good will of those who could write me off, the sun rising each day, a perfect peach in Summer, and love.'

Nadia Bolz-Weber, Facebook page, May 14th

'Whether streamed from a church building or a vicarage, or the Methodist minister's garden labyrinth, or the Lay Minister's summer house, or the Bishop's jacuzzi, this time has enabled many Christians to join in, and to re-learn or learn disciplines in daily prayer.'

Beaker Folk of Husborne Crawley May 14th

'I am not arguing that Thomas did not have doubts, I am arguing that doubts are a consequence of a broken heart, and not an inability to believe.'

Professor Andrew Walker, Ship of Fools website, May 14th

'The great myth of our day is this Coronavirus is a leveller; it's not a leveller. It has a disproportionate impact on [some] communities ... We stand with one another and if one part of the Christian family hurts, we all hurt.'

Gavin Calver CEO of the Evangelical Alliance, Premier Christian News May 15th

'The inspiration is about spirituality, that sense of wellbeing, of arriving at a special place and a sense of being able to breathe, to feel comforted, to feel a sense of belonging.'

Sarah Eberle, designer of the Psalm 23 Garden at the virtual Chelsea Flower Show, May 15th

'Perhaps God has allowed us ... to glimpse how life in His Hands should always be. You see, he only ever expected us to do His will, good, pleasing & perfect as it is, not to frantically try to please everyone, or worse, live up to our own impossibly high standards.'

Gary Cadge, Christian Misfits, May 16th

'Inside the word "emergency" is "emerge"; from an emergency new things come forth'

Rebecca Solnit, Women of the World Festival, May 17th

'You turn inwards on yourself a lot. You become, frankly, narcissistic. And when you have good friends or family who spot it, they can say 'might it not be an idea to talk to someone?'

Archbishop of Canterbury talking to Martin Bashir, Mental Health Awareness Week, May 17th

'A Roman Catholic priest in a US city is using a water pistol in a bid to maintain social distancing ... to continue a tradition of blessing Easter baskets.'

Christian News, May 18th

'I don't know why we needed permission to love each other, but now we have got it. And I hope we keep it.'

Deborah Fielding, Greenbelt Festival guest blog, May 18th

'I HAVE been reading a fair amount of poetry and have been sustained by a group of friends exchanging poems by email, under the banner "Pills to Purge Melancholy". Among some substantial and serious offerings, I encountered the first poem that I have ever seen about serenading an axolotl.'

Very Revd David Hoyle, Dean of Westminster, Church Times, May 18th

'Some governors have deemed liquor stores and abortion clinics as essential, but not churches. It's not right. So I'm correcting this injustice and calling houses of worship essential.'

President Trump, Whitehouse press conference, May 22nd

If he doesn't go, every time he appears in public everyone will do the Pink Panther theme #durhamdurham #durhamdurham

Revd Richard Coles re Dominic Cummings, Twitter, May 23rd

Received a delightful e-mail earlier: 'Stay out of politics or we'll kill you.'

John Inge, Bishop of Worcester, Twitter, May 25th

'I believe after earthquake and plague, the next one is frogs.'

Charlotte Graham-McLay report on New Zealand earthquake, The Guardian, May 25th

'The suggestion I was lightweight was chafing me somewhat and I had complained to God about it - Don't get the impression that God and I sit around all day having chats, because I, like everyone else, find it difficult to work out at times if God is speaking to me, if Satan is talking, if I'm talking to myself, or if I overindulged in curry the night before.'

Jeff Lucas, Jeffanory, Facebook, May 22nd

'I think it was Atilla the Hun who said, 'It is not enough that I succeed, everyone else must fail.' He was not invited to many birthday parties. We had a saying in the church, "nobody wins unless everybody wins."

Gary Cadge, Christian Misfits community, Facebook, May 30th

'Christmas was God with us, Easter was God for us, Pentecost is God in us.'

Revd J John, Facebook, May 30th

'Today our world is experiencing a tragic famine of hope ... Let us, then, become messengers of the comfort bestowed by the Spirit. Let us radiate hope, and the Lord will open new paths as we journey towards the future.'

Pope Francis, joint Pentecost service with Archbishop Justin Welby, May 31st



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11th May 2020

I am writing to thank you for your continuing prayers and support during this difficult and challenging time, during which our lives have been changed and we continue to adapt to a new and different way of living.

Our Ashby Youth for Christ staff are furloughed at present and it is likely that this will be extended until the end of June. I will be consulting with the trustees as we learn more about the lock-down easing from HM Government.

I am certain our exceptionally gifted and valued team members are seeing this time as a sabbatical and a blessing, enabling them to look after their own families' wellbeing, home schooling, and to catch up on tasks which may have been on a waiting list for a considerable time.

It is also an opportunity to think about how our work might be taken forward as we wait for government guidance on schools reopening, the possibility/impossibility of access to schools, group meetings and social distancing rules.

I am also aware that British Youth for Christ are producing online resources which will be available to help our staff reconnect with young people and change their lives by getting to know Jesus. The way forward could well be very different, with exciting new challenges and a different and more digital future, but it will happen.

I read these adapted words in a recent Thought for Today from Youth for Christ, I have them on my desk and read them often-

"that while we take seriously the matters of today, we must trust in God who holds the future in His hand, Keep giving things in prayer instead of worrying about them, its often in the darkest and most challenging places that we know that He is with us. He will never let you down and will never let you go."

I ask you to join me in praying for the well-being of our staff and their families, the young people that we care so deeply about, and the way forward to a new normal.

May I also ask if you are able to, please continue to support us financial so that we are well placed when we are finally able to get back to work.

My continued thanks for your support and prayers

Noreen Mewies
Chair of AYFC Trustees

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